

**“We must all do theatre,
to find out who we are and
discover who we could become.”
– Augusto Boal**

HELLO READER!
and resident of a world
where many things
seem wrong.

Where class, colour, gender, nation, age,
religion and notions of what is normal
and what is not, create unearned privilege
and wealth for some at the expense of
the suffering of many others.



**Hello,
Future Agent
of Change.**

Do you...

Think it is possible to look beyond the criminal and understand the nature of a crime?


Wish that you could stop a crisis that you have witnessed?

Feel bothered by the incompetent laws in society and wish you could write your own?

Feel that helplessness is only an excuse on the part of a witness to injustice?

Feel plagued by guilt for overlooking injustice?

If you've answered yes to one or more of the above, then read on because now it's time to make social change fun, creative and irresistible!
It's all about Forum Theater -
A form of interactive theater that allows you to tackle oppressive situations on stage, yourself, so we can all be better prepared when facing them in real life.



**Who is
Augusto Boal?**



Augusto Boal, the father of Forum Theatre, was a revolutionary theatre artist and cultural activist from Brazil.



Having seen the struggle of the working class against the classist society of Brazil, he brought theatre to the masses as a means of voicing their opinion, when they needed it most. In the early 1960's a new military regime came into power which condemned Boal's unconventional teaching methods and saw him as a threat. Boal was kidnapped in 1971, arrested, tortured and then sent to exile in Argentina for five years. During his exile, Boal developed the Theatre of The Oppressed, which allows the audience of the theatre piece to react and express their views on the subject of the play and raise their concerns, express their opinions and propose solutions that are then incorporated in the play. Initial forms of The Theatre of the Oppressed were in the form of Simultaneous Dramaturgy.





This is a simple audience-actor interaction where the audience members propose solutions to the problem that the protagonist faces. The solutions are played out by the actors one by one until all the solutions have been exhausted. This technique opened up interactive dialogue on stage for the first time. But what was lacking in this model was a certain sense of empathy which is 'personal, unique and non-transferable' that no other actor can imitate. For this, Boal introduced the world of Theatre to Forum Theatre, a play format in which there's no distinction between an actor or a spectator but is witnessed by 'spectators' who can interrupt an unjust act being portrayed in the play and replace an actor to give it an alternative ending.



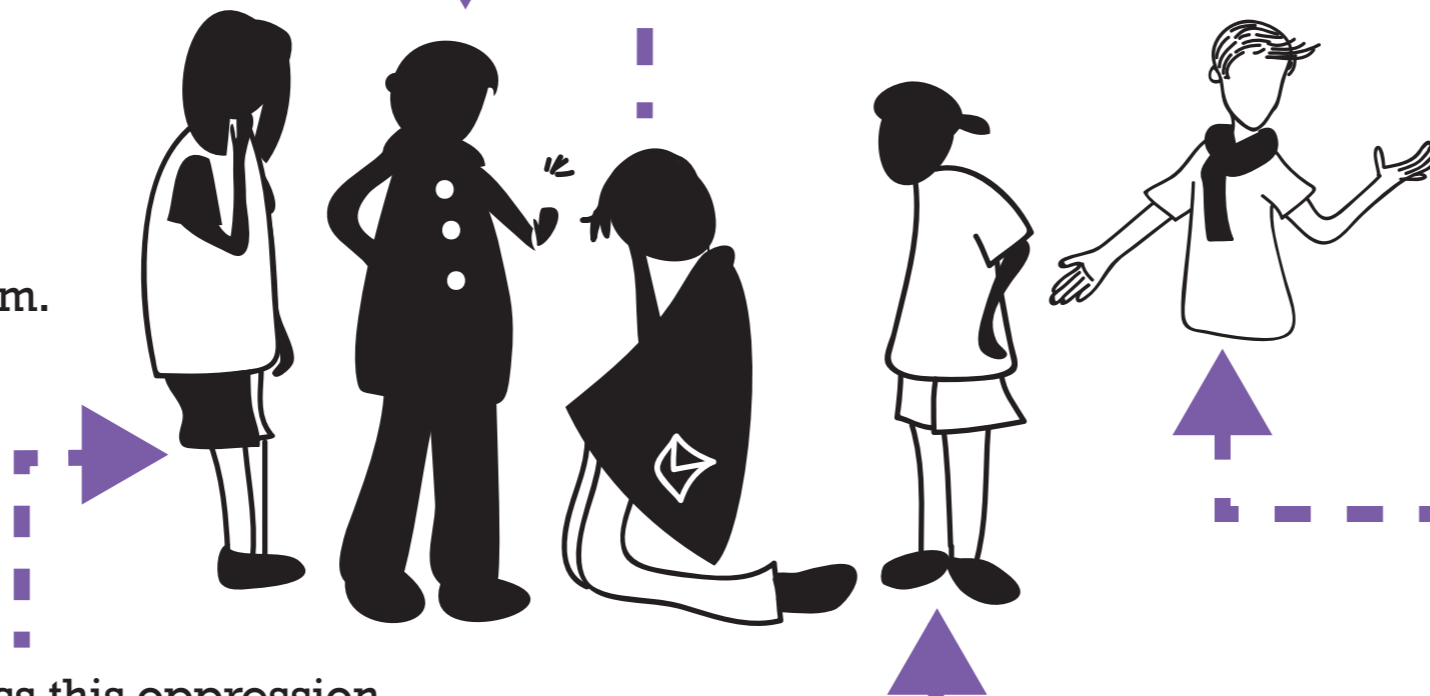
a) the actors present a vision of the world as it is and the spectator intervenes to change it to as it could be.

b) But, if no spectator wishes to intervene and prevent injustice, it can be considered as an acceptance of the situation in real life.



The play revolves around the story of:

The Antagonist:
The one who oppresses him.



The Protagonist:
One who is oppressed.

In a form like forum theatre, where there is so much interaction between different sets of people, don't you surely see the need for a facilitator? A person who breaks the ice between the actors and the spectators. Once the forum begins, the joker encourages, invites, regulates, appreciates, explains, concludes and at times even translates the interventions of a spectator.

The Bystanders: Who witness this oppression
and are at a position to prevent
it from happening.



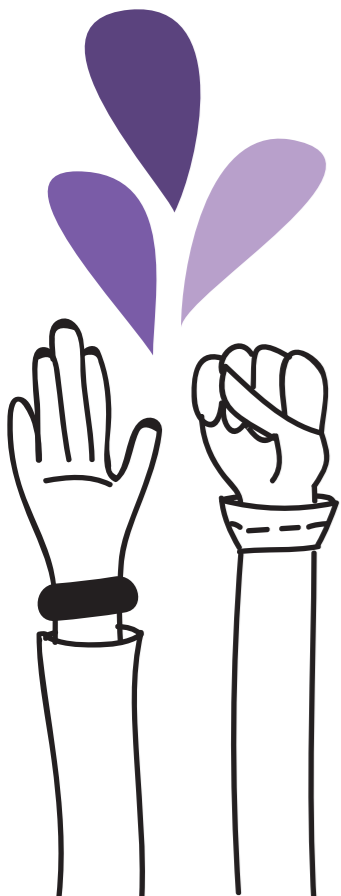
**Forum Theatre:
A step-by-step
guide**

Forum theatre is a form of theatre and just like any other form, it requires a clever script and supporting design that makes it both pleasurable to watch in form and thought-provoking in content.

Now, how do you strike this magical balance between form and content and make the experience for a spectator really valuable?

The Anti-Model

To understand what an anti-model means, it will help to think about what the term 'model' means. A model situation is one where there is deal distribution of power and no construct of oppression. So surely, the anti-modmeans the opposite- an act in Forum Theatre that portrays the oppression. A Forum play can include one or more anti-models that narrate an undesirable but prevalent view of the world.





The spectactors are the members of the audience who are invited on stage to replace the protagonist or a bystander to intervene at the event of an injustice and offer solutions to dissolve the conflict and give the play an optimistic ending.

actor[★] + spectator^{👁️} = SPECTACTOR^{☀️}



The Joker welcomes and warms up the audience. He introduces the context and the members of the play to the audience. As the play begins, it takes us through the life of the protagonist. The cast build the scenes to portray the act of oppression and its consequences. The spectators are given a few minutes to absorb the gravity of the act and reflect upon it.

Sequence of Events

The Joker asks them if this kind of a social set up that is acceptable. Questions like, “Do you feel any empathy after watching this play?” “Are you prepared to fight it if it were a real life situation?” provoke thought and finally the joker poses the question that urges them to act out any possible solution, “ Would you like to try out any solutions?”



The anti-model is repeated a second time and the Joker shouts “stop!” at a point where a spectator stops the play at a point where they see a potential for change. He encourages the spectators to replace a character who holds the power to liberate the protagonist from oppression.

STOP!!

The spectator can do many things. He can:

- a) come in as a new character
- b) replace a bystander
- c) replace the protagonist and offer a solution from the character’s perspective

After some resistance that will exist in a realistic situation, the antagonist party will give in depending on how powerful the offered solution is and the spectators will be able to see the problem unfold with a positive change.

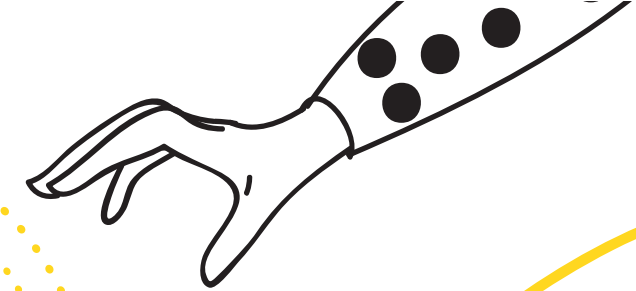

- Recapitulate
- Appreciate
- Thank



Once we witness the consequence of the solution, the Joker stops the act, recapitulates and appreciates the intervention, thanks the spectator for his/her contribution and invites alternative solutions.

The Joker also regulates the Forum- any discussion or debate that may stem from these solutions, he is expected to hold a neutral position, but asking questions that the audience can easily respond to with a Yes or No. In this way the joker always tries keeping a healthy, meaningful discussion going.

Once most possible solutions are exhausted, the Joker summarizes the possible solutions offered by the spectators and presents the opportunities in time that allow one to intervene in a difficult situation. This allows the spectators to review the Forum, to seep the experience in. The play ends on a positive note with emphasis on how a real life crisis always has room for change.

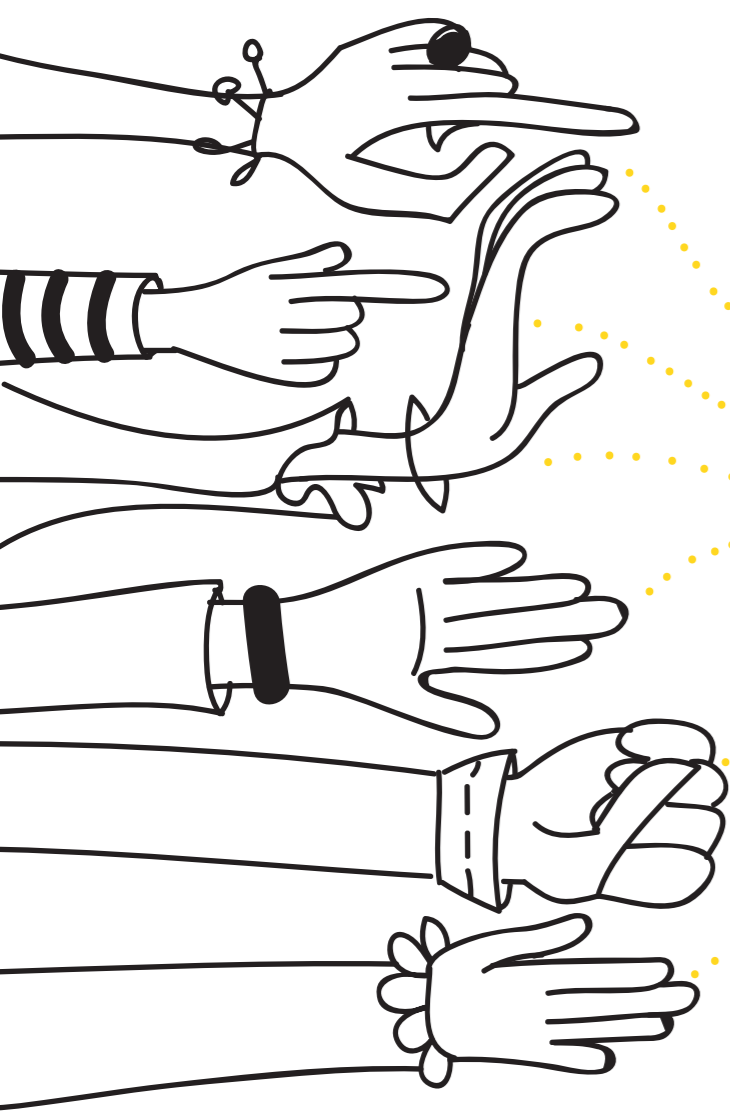


What do you think
the word magic
magic means in this
context?

Magic

In Forum Theatre, 'Magic' refers to a solution offered by a spectator that frees, deletes or makes the oppression of the anti-model vanish by unrealistic means. For example, if a spectator tries to replace the rapist in a sexual abuse scene, it is unrealistic or magical to think of this approach as a possible solution! In real life, is it possible to dissolve matters by wishing a problem away?

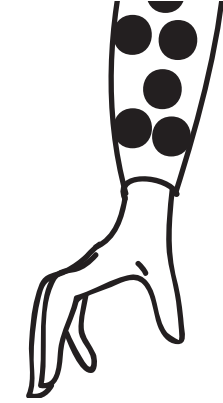
Interventions that use magic seem too good to be true and look at super-human or ideal circumstances. It often happens when we assume that the forces of oppression can be neglected. When Magic as a solution is offered, it is important for the Joker to identify Magic, explain it to the audience and suggest an alternative point of intervention.



On the other hand if the oppression in the anti-model is portrayed to the spectators at a point so extreme that it cannot be prevented, it leaves no room for intervention and ends the play with a sense of helplessness and loss. For example -when one shows the protagonist being held at gun-point. If battling the oppression (or in this case aggression) is only through physical self-defense, the purpose of a forum is defeated. How can we, as spectators reflect on the root of the problem and try to prevent it from building into aggression that



Writing your own Forum Piece

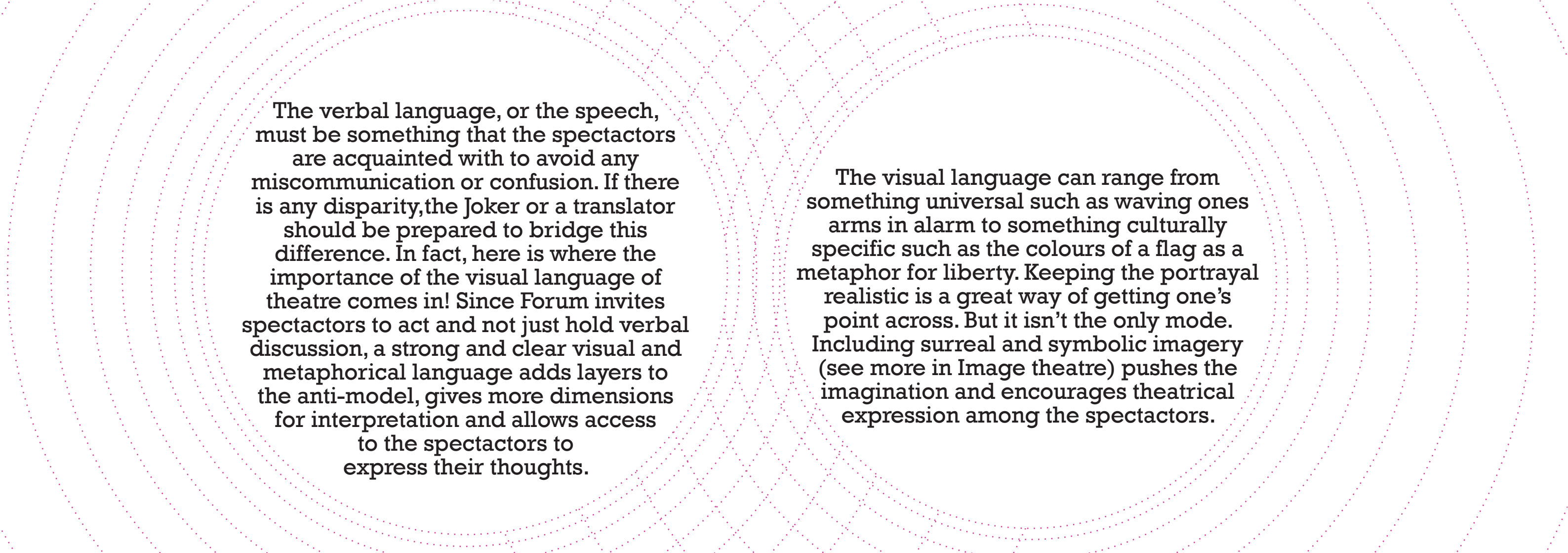


All oppressions are of equal importance— to the people who are being subjected to them
– Augusto Boal

Is the oppression on a child being bullied in the lunch hall less significant than that of a refugee being tortured by militants? Can you see how the suffering of two individuals cannot be compared on the same parameters?

Any subject that enuinely wants liberation, that requires the drawing of attention and discussion towards it, can be constructed into forum theatre. It should ideally be a form of oppression that society can regonize, but is aware of neglecting, that is relevant to the spectators and that they can relate and respond to.

What is important is how precisely the problem is put forth – as Boal puts it, if the presentation of the problem is done in a hazy manner, the solutions will be as hazy, the discussion as awry. A clear, well-constructed, strongly portrayed problem will bring about clear, specific and strong reactions and solutions.



The verbal language, or the speech, must be something that the spectators are acquainted with to avoid any miscommunication or confusion. If there is any disparity, the Joker or a translator should be prepared to bridge this difference. In fact, here is where the importance of the visual language of theatre comes in! Since Forum invites spectators to act and not just hold verbal discussion, a strong and clear visual and metaphorical language adds layers to the anti-model, gives more dimensions for interpretation and allows access to the spectators to express their thoughts.

The visual language can range from something universal such as waving one's arms in alarm to something culturally specific such as the colours of a flag as a metaphor for liberty. Keeping the portrayal realistic is a great way of getting one's point across. But it isn't the only mode. Including surreal and symbolic imagery (see more in Image theatre) pushes the imagination and encourages theatrical expression among the spectators.

Other Techniques

How can we use metaphors and symbols to convey oppression through theatre? How can we prevent a forum play from resembling a boring monologue? How can we bring spectators to understand a language that is not limited to words?

Image Theatre, as the name suggests, avoids using words altogether. It uses the spontaneity offered by movement, body language, objects, gestures, colours and visual signals that connect to our day-to-day perception. Through this, we make the language on stage more universal and relatable.

Rainbow Of Desires is an introspective technique that uses words and images to give us an view of what goes on inside a character's mind. It helps us see how internal conflicts of both the protagonist and the antagonist comes across as oppression. This fair view of situations helps in deepening the nature of the interventions. Using this, you will be able to see beyond the black and white, good and evil, right and wrong to be able to better understand the spectrum of human behavior.



**Functioning
as a Forum
Theatre Group**

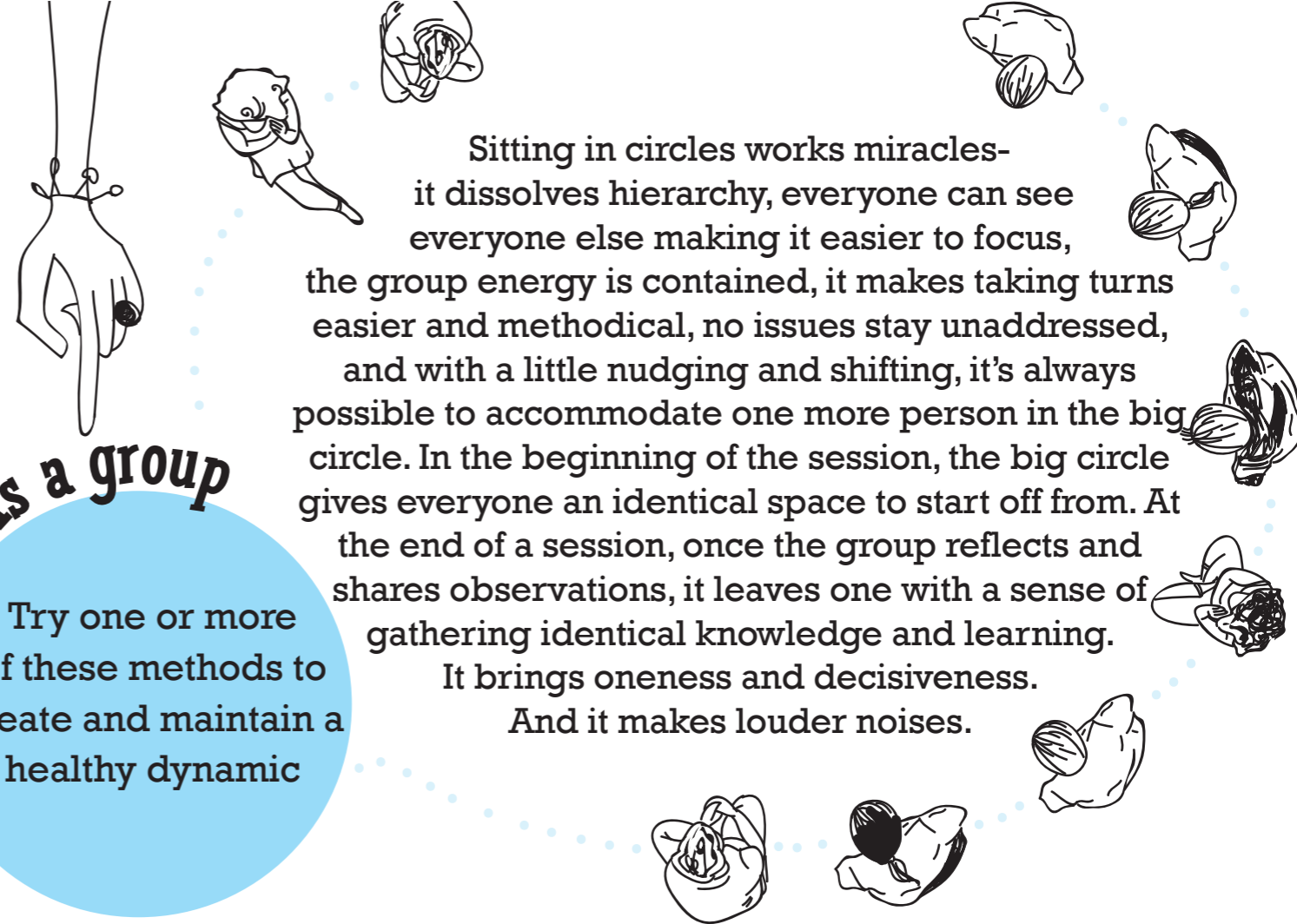
Belonging to the big circle.

Actors in forum write their own script through long sessions of spontaneous theatre, improvisation and reflection. Are we not members of the very society we are acting against? Encouraging habits of teamwork during rehearsal goes a long way in maintaining a healthy group dynamic. Trust, belonging and having an equal status in the group enhances one's willingness to contribute as one knows that one is being heard.

As a group

Try one or more of these methods to create and maintain a healthy dynamic

Sitting in circles works miracles- it dissolves hierarchy, everyone can see everyone else making it easier to focus, the group energy is contained, it makes taking turns easier and methodical, no issues stay unaddressed, and with a little nudging and shifting, it's always possible to accommodate one more person in the big circle. In the beginning of the session, the big circle gives everyone an identical space to start off from. At the end of a session, once the group reflects and shares observations, it leaves one with a sense of gathering identical knowledge and learning. It brings oneness and decisiveness. And it makes louder noises.



Record

Keep markers and paper handy when in discussion.



Lay down big sheets of paper in the centre and allow free expression of needs, wants, fears, hopes and any concerns that people voice for late reference.

Record and remember what makes up the interests of the group and respond to them accordingly.

Note ideas when brainstorming. Write big.



When in action, take pictures, videos, audio recordings. What comes up in group discussions will greatly affect what forms the content of the anti-model. Observe not only the obvious, but dig deep into the undercurrents of the actions and what may have provoked them. And record, to include these details in the script for the anti-model.



To keep your content true to a world view, make it well-rounded with more than one perspective. As a group, switch roles and power play. Put yourselves in the shoes of someone who is on the other end of the spectrum. Play both, an antagonist and a protagonist.

Switch Roles

As an individual, try switching your gaze from outward to inward. Observe yourself as a member of the society and how your relationships with society change with change in context. A greater sense of empathy will develop in us not only from listening to others but listening to oneself thinking like someone else.

Many emotions that are raw, uncomfortable and private emerge in discussions that lead to writing an anti-model. There are matters of secrecy that may be clouded by negative emotions. But as a group, learn to keep matters confidential with responsibility and sensitivity. Respect anonymity or refusal to participate in certain discussions.



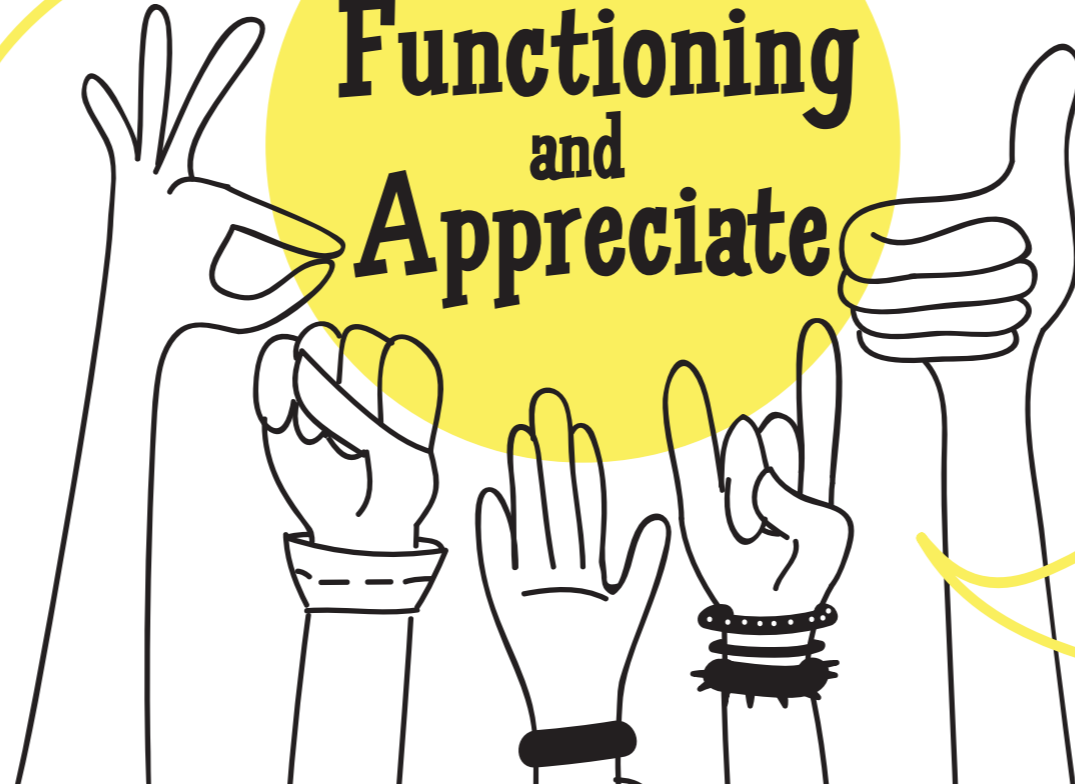
**CONFIDE
TRUST
PROTECT**



Chances are that as we build trust, refusal will morph into hesitation which will slowly bloom into willingness to share. With trust alone can we keep shame, guilt, hurt and anger from getting in the way of an effective anti-model. With trust, and secret societies with cool dress codes.

On several occasions, talking about oppression in one's own lives is a struggle which a participant will undergo for the sake of the group. At the same time, learn to detach yourself enough to critically analyze what fits the script and makes for powerful content.

Functioning and Appreciate



Nevertheless, appreciate each other's courage to let go of the fear of being judged. After all, the more people we thank at the end of a session, the richer the day has been in gaining a variety of perspectives.



**Games
for a
Forum Group**





Spectrum

Ask a series of questions with two different answers and depending on what they think, participants should arrange themselves more towards one answer on one end, another answer on another end, or somewhere along the line in the middle.

For eg, ask “If you are having a terrible day and wish you weren't here, stand over to the left, if you are thrilled to be here, have energy for the day, stand to the right. Or if you are somewhere in the middle, stand somewhere in the middle, or a little more to the side that you agree with a little more. Stand anywhere along the line that represents what you think. There are no right or wrong answers.”
Ask why they chose to stand where they standing, again emphasizing if necessary that there are no answers better than others, or more correct- this is simply an activity to see what people are thinking.



- One partner tries to keep their face aligned with the other partner's hand as they move that hand around.
- Switch roles, so that the previous leader follows.
- Both partners follow and lead at the same time.

Columbian Hypnosis Boal

Secret thought or secret wish:
Everyone speaks their secret thought or what they secretly want simultaneously and then one at a time they share the essence of that thought when tapped.

Double-
Someone steps up and mirrors the protagonist's body language and makes statements in the first person based on the feelings that arise in their body. Think of it as someone offering inner thoughts.



Pause-
To stop a scene and have everyone hold the body posture of the paused moment. Helpful when you identify a destructive behavioral pattern cycle is just beginning and give the actors/spectators a chance to observe their bodies and the direction of the anti-model.

Fast Forward/ Rewind-
Go back in time or ahead to the future. Every conflict has a history and every resolution has its consequences. Fast-forward for previewing outcomes or possible consequences. Rewind for showing context and history. Rewind is especially useful when the conflict appears to start with a violent altercation, through a rewind you may find that the conflict actually had roots in the lunch line yesterday.

Soliloquy

A poetic monologue that can be used during a pause to make inner thoughts public and deepen understanding of where each other are coming from. At any point in the act, pause and ask an actor how they are feeling.

“I’m frustrated, no one wants to believe me. I’m extremely disappointed and hurt.” Once the feelings are expressed and heard, resume the play.

Multiple Endings- Replay the scene with different endings. Identify a pivotal moment in the scene while it's enacted the first time through. Once it ends, invite a rewind back to that pivotal point and ask the characters to replay it in a different way. If the participants can't think of any other endings then pose "what if" questions.

Things to keep in mind for the Joker



Being aware of one's physical stance at all times is a must. For instance if the stage is on a higher dais, the Joker could lower his stance to a sitting position to be at the same level as the audience.

Using a neutral tone, that avoids being judgemental of drawing conclusions is important so the spectator can build trust with the Joker.

For answers that ring in unison, it is important for the Joker's questions to be framed crisply. Go for questions that can be answered in a Yes or a No.

Even though all the actors should watch out for Magic in an intervention, it is the job of the Joker to identify it. But instead of ruling the solution out, he can instead ask the audience to decide if it is a possible, realistic solution.

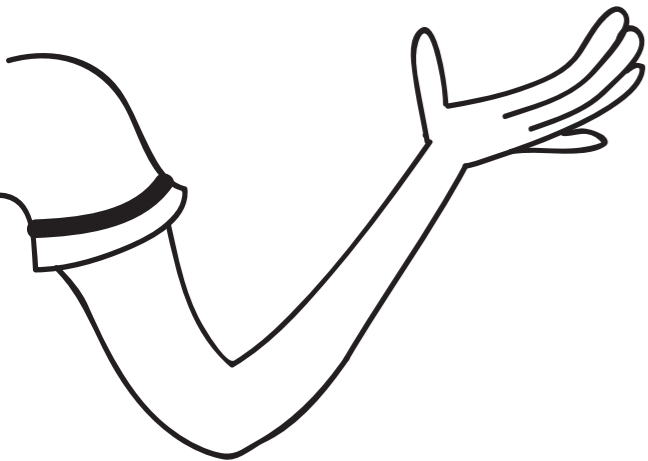
Where is it used?

Social behaviour compels us to think from within the roles that we play in our daily lives such as a student, worker, bread-winner, mother, teacher etc. Despite ourselves, we invoke and reinforce these hierarchies, orders and connotations and distance ourselves from communicating as fellow humans. Forum theatre is a medium of breaking these patterns and behaviours, sometimes donning new ones altogether, and communicating the way our bodies guide us, from one human to another.

Potential of Forum Theatre

The potential of Forum theatre has been recognized in Policy Making, where important perspectives as brought forward by various citizens and the distribution of power can be understood more sensitively.

In the realm of Medical Humanities, Forum Workshops allow better understanding between patients, their families and physicians. This fragile relationship requires not only an understanding of the other but also thorough self awareness, that is provided by the voicing of opinions and feelings under crucial circumstances portrayed in forum anti-models.



In the classroom, traditionally a space that hegemonises the teacher, the technique of Forum Theatre democratises space. Instead of assuming that the knowledge of a teacher always puts him/her in authority, the classroom becomes a space of learning and problem solving for everyone. Everyone is a spectator, a teacher and a student. In the end, becoming a participant of Forum is a process of realization and reflection. It can be unsettling and painful when buried feelings are stirred, but there can be no better way to voice one's struggle, whether in one's personal life, in the classroom, at a workplace or on the warring borders of countries. The subject of the Forum can be ever-changing, but what remains constant is the empathetic human dialogue it generates - something the world could use more of. Something worth spreading wherever life takes you.



Glossary

Anti-Model:
An act of forum theatre that portrays the opposite of an ideal situation.

Antagonist:
Character who acts as a force of oppression.

Connotation:
An idea or feeling that a word invokes for a person in addition to its literal or primary meaning.

Inner-conflict:
The range of emotions that occur within a character of the anti-model, both positive and negative. The thoughts that lead to a dilemma between choosing to live under oppression or seeking liberation.

Intervention:
The act of a spectator interrupting the forum play when it runs a second time and replacing a character to address the oppression through theatre.

Joker:
The facilitator of the forum model of theatre who conducts the session with a neutral stand.

Soliloquy:
A poetic monologue of any member that expresses their inner thoughts.

Change:
To make the nature, content or the future course of something different from what it would be if left alone.

Liberation:
The seeking of equal status or just treatment for or on behalf of any group believed to be discriminated against.

Social Change:
Refers to an alternation in the social order of society.

Magic:
Any forum intervention that liberates the protagonist but in an unrealistic manner such as replacing the antagonist.

Spectator : The audience of forum theatre, not simply spectators but participating members who can intervene in the performance and alter its direction.

Oppression:
The exercise of authority or power in an unjust manner.